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PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [NG](#)
SUBJECT: Niger: 2009 Country Report on Terrorism

Ref: State 109980

11. (SBU) Summary: Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has demonstrated a greater interest in the Republic of Niger (RON) in 2009, with attempts to extend its influence into Nigerien territory from the largely ungoverned region bordering Mali and Algeria. The porous borders and ungoverned spaces provide violent, extremist groups such as AQIM a promising environment for weapons and drug trafficking, recruiting, people and contraband smuggling, undetected transit, and logistical facilitation. The RON's severe resource constraints stemming from its status as one of the poorest countries in the world, and the ongoing political crisis, hamper the Nigerien government's ability to prevent AQIM intrusion. Additionally, extremist sects in northern Nigeria, such as the Boko Haram movement, have drawn Nigerien followers and pose a threat of spreading extremism into Niger. End summary.

Niger's Security Environment

12. (SBU) Niger is at great risk from the spread of terrorism and violent extremist organizations. Stark poverty, porous borders, large ungoverned spaces and the proximity to known safe havens of southern Algeria, northern Mali and northern Nigeria make Niger particularly vulnerable. Further, the Government of Niger's (GON) historic tensions with Tuareg rebel groups, traditionally associated with cross-Sahara smuggling in northern Niger, contributes to the potential establishment of a breeding ground for future terrorists. In spite of these external threats, the vast majority of Nigeriens practice a moderate form of Sufi Islam and popular opinion condemns violence and terrorism. In Niger, terrorism is of external origin, rather than being indigenous.

13. (SBU) The GON counterterrorism program has improved to include the use of updated terrorist watch lists, more consistent border patrols and regular monitoring of mosques believed to espouse extremist views. (Note: Border crossings are not automated and rely on handwritten ledgers to record entry and exit. End note.) Further, Nigerien military forces routinely engage smugglers who attempt to take advantage of the open spaces and porous borders in the north. The GON has been receptive to Western and regional counterterrorism training and is a Trans Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) country. Niger, now with a diminished role in TSCTP due to USG policy holds and sanctions, has turned primarily to regional partners and organizations to support its counterterrorism efforts, notably the Algerian-led counterterrorist coalition comprised of Algeria, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania.

Events Impacting Niger

14. (U) On December 14, 2008 AQIM-affiliated persons kidnapped and held hostage UN Special Envoy, Robert Fowler, his colleague, Louis Guay, and a local Nigerien driver. They were captured by AQIM within 40 kilometers of Niamey, taken across the Mali border and

held hostage in the Sahara desert for 130 days. On January 22, 2009, along the Mali/Niger border, AQIM-affiliated persons kidnapped four European tourists and held them hostage in the Sahara desert. Three of the European hostages were released months later, but one hostage, a Brit, was killed.

¶5. (SBU) In October 2009, an AQIM-linked Mauritanian was captured in Niamey following his involvement in terror related activities outside Niger.

¶6. (SBU) On 14 November 2009, AQIM associates, armed with AK-47 assault rifles attempted to kidnap five U.S. Embassy personnel from a hotel in Tahoua. The failed operation is believed to have been sanctioned by AQIM leaders. The perpetrators of this attempted kidnapping have yet to be captured.

¶7. (SBU) Although the rise of violent extremist organizations in northern Nigeria has yet to directly impact southern Niger, a very real threat exists. Northern Nigeria and southern Niger share a common Hausa ethnicity, numerous economic and cultural links, and a long, porous border. Immediately following the July 2009 Nigerian break-up of the Boko Haram (anti-Western influence) group, Nigerien ties to the group were revealed when dozens of Boko Haram members were deported from Nigeria to their home cities in southern Niger.

Prospects for the Future

¶8. (SBU) As Niger enters 2010, the horizon looks very troubling with increasing threats from AQIM in the north and west, from the Boko Haram movement and similar groups from Nigeria. The growing threats together with the looming political crisis in Niger, as sanctions are implemented, may limit the much-needed international assistance

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that can be offered to the GON; this presents an environment ripe for exploitation by terrorist and violent, extremist groups. To date, moderate Islam and the Nigerien intolerance for violence have prevented terrorism from taking root, but without external support and regional cooperation, Niger will remain vulnerable.

¶9. (U) Embassy Niamey point of contact for terrorism-related issues is Pol Officer Syga Thomas, who can be reached at thomass2@state.gov.

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